

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 173820

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TO AMEMBASSY MEXICO IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS:PBOR, MX

SUBJECT: SALINITY-TEXT OF BROWNELL PRESS CONFERENCE OCTOBER

FOLLOWING FROM OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(LAGUNA BEACH, CALIFORNIA)

AUGUST 30, 1973

THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESS CONFERENCE
OF
AMBASSADOR HERBERT BROWNELL
SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PRESIDENT
FOR
RESOLUTION OF THE SALINITY PROBLEM WITH MEXICO
THE BRIEFING ROOM

12:33 P.M. PDT

MR. WARREN: AMBASSADOR HERBERT BROWNELL HAS BEEN, AS YOU KNOW,
AS THE INFORMATION WHICH YOU HAVE HAS INFORMED YOU, THE PRESIDENT'S
PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE WORKING ON THE PROBLEM OF SALINE
WATER MOVING INTO MEXICO FROM THE COLORADO RIVER.
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 STATE 173820

HE HAS MET WITH THE PRESIDENT THIS MORNING TO DISCUSS
THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF HIS WORK AND I WILL TURN THE
MATTER OVER TO AMBASSADOR BROWNELL, WHO WILL DISCUSS THE
INFORMATION YOU HAVE.

I WILL REMIND YOU AGAIN OF THE TOTAL EMBARGO ON THAT

INFORMATION.

MR. AMBASSADOR.

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: I MET WITH PRESIDENT NIXON THIS MORNING TO GIVE HIM MY FINAL REPORT. AS HIS PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE, WE HAVE BEEN NEGOTIATING OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS WITH THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT TO TRY AND RESOLVE A DISPUTE THAT HAS PLAGUED THE TWO GOVERNMENTS FOR THE LAST 12 YEARS OR MORE OVER EXCESS SALINITY IN THE COLORADO RIVER.

IT IS BASICALLY AS IT AFFECTS THE AGRICULTURAL CROPS IN THE MEXICALI VALLEY OF MEXICO.

WE HAVE REACHED AN AGREEMENT WITH THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT, AS YOU PERHAPS KNOW FROM ADVANCE INFORMATION, AND THE PROTOCOL OR THE MINUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY COMMISSION WHICH REFLECTS THAT AGREEMENT WILL BE SIGNED IN MEXICO CITY LATER THIS AFTERNOON.

IF THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS THAT ANY OF YOU WOULD LIKE IN THE WAY OF EXPLANATION, I WILL TRY TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS.

1 CAN YOU TELL US WHAT THIS SALINATION PLANT WILL COST, APPROXIMATELY?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: THE TOTAL COST OF THE PROJECT WE ESTIMATE AT ABOUT 115 MILLION, OF WHICH *67 MILLION IS THE ESTIMATED COST OF THE DESALTING PLANT.

Q CAN YOU SUMMARIZE FOR US WHAT THE AGREEMENT IS?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: THE AGREEMENT IS SUBSTANTIALLY THIS: THAT STARTING NEXT YEAR, THE UNITED STATES AGREES WITH MEXICO THAT THE SALINITY OF THE COLORADO RIVER AS IT GOES OVER THE INTERNATIONAL BORDER WILL BE AT A SPECIFIED LEVEL, WHICH IS DESCRIBED AS 115 PARTS PER MILLION, PLUS OR MINUS 30, AND THAT MEANS THAT WE HAVE AGREED TO ELIMINATE THE ADVERSE SALINITY EFFECTS OF THE WELLTON-MOHAWK DISTRICT WHICH WAS OPENED UP ABOUT 12 YEARS AGO AND LARGELY CAUSED THIS EXCESS SALINITY.

IN ORDER TO CARRY THAT AGREEMENT INTO EFFECT, THAT PROMISE TO MEXICO TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THE WATER, THE ADMINISTRATION WILL PRESENT A PROGRAM TO CONGRESS, PERHAPS NEXT MONTH, WHICH WILL CALL FOR BUILDING A DESALTING PLANT IN ARIZONA TO

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 STATE 173820

DESALT THE WATERS THAT COME FROM THE WELLTON-MOHAWK DISTRICT.

IN ADDITION TO THAT, IN ORDER TO OBTAIN MORE AND A BETTER QUALITY OF WATER, THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION WILL PROVIDE FOR RELINING A SEGMENT OF ABOUT 50 MILES OF THE COACHELLA CANAL IN CALIFORNIA, AND THE THIRD BIG PUBLIC WORK THAT IS INVOLVED WILL BE THE BUILDING OF A DRAINAGE OUTLET FROM THE DESALTING PLANT RIGHT THROUGH MEXICO TO THE SANTA CLARA SLOUGH ON THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA WHICH WILL DRAIN OFF THE BRINE WHICH COMES FROM THE DESALTING PLANT.

Q MR. AMBASSADOR, COULD YOU GIVE US SOME WORDS SO THAT US EASTERNERS CAN UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS THING ECONOMICALLY, HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO THE FARMERS?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: I THINK SO, BY DOING A BRIEF AMOUNT OF BACKGROUND.

THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO ENTERED INTO AN AGREEMENT IN 1944 WHICH CALLED FOR DELIVERY OF A CERTAIN QUANTITY OF WATER TO MEXICO EACH YEAR, BUT THERE WAS NOTHING SAID IN THE AGREEMENT ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THE WATER AND, WHEN SOME OF THESE IRRIGATION DISTRICTS OPENED UP, LIKE THE WELLTON-MOHAWK DISTRICT, IT SUBSTANTIALLY DECREASED THE QUALITY OF THE WATER SO THAT MEXICO HAD COMPLAINED THAT IT MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THEM TO PROFITABLY USE IRRIGATED LANDS IN THE MEXICALI VALLEY FOR THE GROWING OF AGRICULTURAL CROPS.

THEIR CLAIM WAS A SUBSTANTIAL ONE AND MANY HUNDREDS OF ACRES, IF NOT THOUSANDS OF ACRES, IN THEIR CALCULATIONS, WERE ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY THE LOW QUALITY OF THE WATER. AND MANY ACRES WERE TAKEN OUT OF CULTIVATION ALL TOGETHER SO THAT IT MEANT A DECREASE IN THEIR AGRICULTURAL INCOME AND IT MEANT A DECREASE IN THE STANDARD OF LIVING, ACCORDING TO THEIR REPORTS, OF MANY OF THE FARMERS IN THAT AREA OF MEXICO.

THE PURPOSE, THEREFORE, OF THIS AGREEMENT WAS TO RESTORE THE QUALITY OF THE WATER, GUARANTEE THAT FOR THE FUTURE AND SETTLE THIS IRRITATING DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS. AND IT WILL MEAN THAT FROM NOW ON, THEY WILL HAVE USABLE WATER FOR THE IRRIGATION OF THE CROPS IN THAT WHOLE VALLEY.

Q MR. AMBASSADOR, IF I UNDERSTAND YOU CORRECTLY, THIS AGREEMENT CANNOT REALLY GO INTO PRACTICAL EFFECT UNTIL CONGRESS APPROVES THESE PROJECTS' APPROPRIATIONS AND THE DESALTING PLANT IS BUILT.

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: THAT IS CORRECT. UNTIL THEY AUTHORIZE THE THREE PUBLIC WORKS THAT I MENTIONED.
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 04 STATE 173820

Q HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO COMPLETE THOSE PUBLIC WORKS?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: THE PUBLIC WORKS, THEMSELVES, THE DESALTING PLANT WILL NOT BE FINISHED UNTIL 1978 EVEN IF THE CONGRESS ACTS, AS WE ANTICIPATE, THIS YEAR.

MEANWHILE, HOWEVER, WE WOULD GIVE THEM THE BETTER QUALITY OF WATER. AS SOON AS THE AUTHORIZATION BILL IS PASSED, THE AGREEMENT PROVIDES THAT THE QUALITY WILL IMMEDIATELY IMPROVE AND WE ESTIMATE THAT WOULD BE SOMETIME DURING THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF 1974.

Q HOW COULD THAT BE ACHIEVED?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: THAT WILL BE DONE BY BORROWING WATER FROM STORAGE AND THAT WILL BE REPAID BACK OUT OF THE WATER SAVED FROM THE RELINING OF THE COACHELLA CANAL.

Q HOW MUCH DAMAGE, HOW MANY MILLION DOLLARS IN DAMAGES HAVE THE MEXICAN FARMERS ASKED FOR THE DAMAGE TO THE MEXICALI VALLEY CROPLANDS?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: OF COURSE, THAT HAS NEVER BEEN ADJUDICATED, BUT THE CLAIMS HAVE BEEN UP TO ABOUT \$18&EE TN
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NOW, IS THE DRAINAGE DITCH THAT IS GOING TO BE LINED TO THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA, IS THAT GOING TO BE IN LIEU OF THE

DAMAGES THAT THE MEXICAN FARMERS HAVE ASKED?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: THERE IS NO PROVISION FOR DAMAGES IN THIS AGREEMENT WHATSOEVER.

Q I KNOW IT IS AN "IN LIEU OF". PRESIDENT ALVAREZ SAID LAST MONTH THAT THE DRAINAGE DITCH, THE LINED CANAL WHICH WILL PROTECT THEIR WELLS IN THE MEXICALI VALLEY WOULD BE IN LIEU OF, OR PART OF, THE DAMAGE CLAIMS THAT THE MEXICAN FARMERS HAVE MADE. IS THIS TRUE?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: I THINK YOU COULD SAY THAT THE WHOLE SETTLEMENT IS IN LIEU OF AN ACrimonious DISPUTE OVER DAMAGES, YES. THE WHOLE SETTLEMENT IS IN SUBSTITUTION FOR FIGHTING IT OUT.

Q HOW MUCH WILL THAT DRAINAGE NOW COST?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: THE THREE PROJECTS I MENTIONED, ONE WAS THE DESALTING PLANT ESTIMATED AT *67 MILLION, THE RELINING OF THE 50-MILE STRETCH OF THE COACHELLA CANAL AND RELOCATION OF IT WILL COST *21 MILLION, AND THE DRAINAGE FACILITY DOWN TO THE GULF OF CALIFORNIA WOULD BE ANOTHER 15.
UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 05 STATE 173820

Q SO, THIS IS A BARGAIN RESOLUTION, THEN IN OTHER WORDS WE ARE GOING TO SETTLE ABOUT *150 MILLION IN ALLEGED CLAIMS, FOR ABOUT *115; IS THAT RIGHT?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: THAT MIGHT BE AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION BECAUSE THERE ARE MANY BENEFITS THAT RUN BOTH TO THE UNITED STATES AND TO MEXICO THAT GROW OUT OF THE AGREEMENT THAT WOULD NOT OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED HAD WE NOT HAD A FRIENDLY SETTLEMENT.

Q *115 OR *150 MILLION?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: *115 MILLION.

Q COULD YOU EXPLAIN WHY OR HOW THE WATER BECOMES MORE SALTY? I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND FROM THE BACKGROUND.

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: IF I CAN CARRY BACK TO A YEAR AGO WHEN I STARTED IN ON THIS JOB, I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND IT EITHER. EVERY TIME A NEW IRRIGATION PROJECT IS OPENED UP, THE WATER THAT IS USED FLOWS BACK, SOME OF IT, INTO THE RIVER AND IT PICKS UP ALONG THE WAY THESE SOLID PARTICLES OF MINERAL MATTER AND THEY ARE DISSOLVED IN THE WATER AND THE SO-CALLED SALINITY OF THE WATER IS INCREASED.

AND YOU GET ABOVE A CERTAIN LEVEL AND THE WATER BECOMES UNUSABLE FOR AGRICULTURAL PURPOSES.

1 HAVE WE PROMISED CLEAN WATER BY NEXT JUNE, IS THAT WHAT IT BOILS DOWN TO?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: YES, SUBJECT TO THE CONGRESSIONAL AUTHORIZATION ACT.

Q MR. AMBASSADOR, I DON'T QUITE UNDERSTAND WHAT THE INTERIM MAINTENANCE WILL BE BEFORE THE OTHER PROJECTS ARE COMPLETED. DO WE HAVE SO MUCH WATER STORED THAT WE CAN GIVE IT AWAY?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: YES, THERE IS AN INTERIM AGREEMENT THAT IS IN EFFECT NOW, AND WE TAKE SOME WATER OUT OF STORAGE AND MIX IT WITH THE REGULAR WATERS OF THE RIVER AND GIVE THEM

A GOOD QUALITY SO THE ONLY INTERIM MEASURE, OTHER THAN CONTINUATION OF THAT, WOULD BE THAT WHEN WE RELINE THE COACHELLA CANAL, WHICH TAKES TWO OR THREE YEARS, THEN THERE WILL BE ADDITIONAL WATER THAT IS NOW WASTED WHICH CAN BE USED, AND IT WILL NOT ANY LONGER BE NECESSARY TO TAKE WATER OUT OF STORAGE. IN FACT, THE WATERS TAKEN OUT OF STORAGE CAN BE REPAID INTO STORAGE.

Q THIS LINING ELIMINATES THE WATER FLOWING THROUGH THE CANAL PICKING UP THE SALT; IS THAT CORRECT?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: IT WILL GATHER AND SAVE WATER THAT UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 06 STATE 173820

IS NOW BEING WASTED.

Q MR. BROWNELL, HOW WILL IT DO THAT?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: BY THE CONCRETE LINING.

Q MR. BROWNELL, WILL THIS RESTORE THE QUALITY OF THE WATER TO WHAT THEY WERE GETTING WHEN THE AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED IN 1944?

AMBASSADOR BROWNELL: YES, IT COMPLE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 10 MAY 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGREEMENTS, PRESIDENTIAL MISSIONS, SALINITY, PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 31 AUG 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973STATE173820
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: ARA/MEX:JRHAMILTON
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730869/abqceiks.tel
Line Count: 236
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ORIGIN ARA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: cunninfx
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags: ANOMALY
Review Date: 17 JAN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <17-Jan-2002 by reddocgw>; APPROVED <11 MAR 2002 by cunninfx>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SALINITY-TEXT OF BROWNELL PRESS CONFERENCE OCTOBER
TAGS: PBOR, MX, US, (BROWNELL, HERBERT)
To: MEXICO
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005